

# Indonesian prez warns not to rush COVID vaccines amid halal concern

● Senior ministers have indicated that emergency vaccine authorisation could be granted

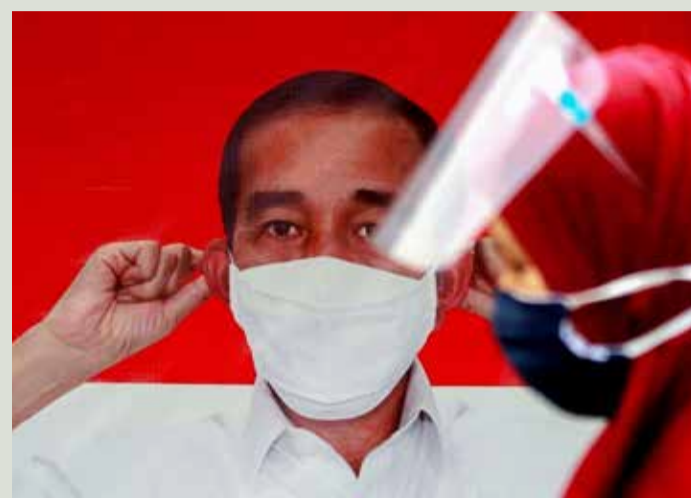
Reuters | Jakarta

The president of the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, Joko Widodo, called yesterday for Indonesia not to rush the rollout of vaccines, citing concerns over public awareness about whether they were halal.

With more than 365,000 coronavirus cases and 12,000 deaths, Indonesia has struggled to get its outbreak under control and the government has been racing to secure a supply of vaccines while still under development, drawing criticism from some epidemiologists for seeking a "silver bullet" solution before full vaccine efficacy and safety is known.

Senior ministers have indicated that emergency vaccine authorisation could be granted as early as November.

But the president, better known by his moniker "Jokowi", signaled a more cautionary approach, warning against haste



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JOKO WIDODO

and urging clear public messaging about whether vaccines were halal, or permissible under Islam.

“I ask that this vaccine is not rushed because it's so complex,” Jokowi said ahead of a closed meeting.

“I want to ensure there is good preparation. On public communication, especially in relation to halal and haram, the price, and quality.”

Indonesia has previously pledged to vaccinate more than 100 million people next year, but Jokowi on Monday said that scale of inoculation in an archipelagic nation of 270 million would be uniquely challenging.

Controversy over whether vaccines adhere to Islamic principles has stymied public health responses before in Indonesia, including in 2018, when the Indonesian Ulema Council issued a fatwa declaring a measles vaccine was haram, or forbidden under Islam.

## 50 million doses

Indonesia has secured 50 million doses from China's Sinovac by March next year and 100 million from AstraZeneca by next April, in addition to other deals.

Vaccines from Sinovac as well as China's Sinopharm and CanSino Biologics for 9.1 million people will be available this

year, with health workers prioritised, said Achmad Yurianto, a senior health ministry official.

Indonesia's rush to secure supplies of unproven vaccines has generated concern among epidemiologists, some of which argue it should instead focus on testing and contact tracing until a safe and effective vaccine is available.

“Many countries think a vaccine will be their silver bullet to deal with the pandemic,” said Dicky Budiman, an Indonesian epidemiologist from Australia's Griffith University.

“But unfortunately, the history of pandemics, the literature, does not support that.”

## News in brief



◆ A Russian court on Monday sentenced the former mayor of the Arctic city of Norilsk to six months of community service after finding him guilty of negligence over a major fuel spill in the region. Rinat Akhmetchin, who resigned as mayor in July, was charged with negligence after a fuel tank at a power station in the remote, industrial region lost pressure and collapsed in late May, leaking more than 20,000 tonnes of fuel into rivers and subsoil. Greenpeace has compared the incident to the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill off the coast of Alaska.

**Russian court sentences Arctic city mayor to community service**

◆ The Indian army said on Monday that it had captured a Chinese soldier after he strayed across a contested de facto border in the western Himalayan region where both countries have amassed thousands of troops after a deadly clash in

**India says Chinese soldier apprehended in Ladakh, to be returned**



June. The People's Liberation Army soldier was apprehended in the

Demchok area of eastern Ladakh, and would be returned after the completion of formalities, the Indian army said in a statement. “The PLA soldier has been provided medical assistance including oxygen, food and warm clothes to protect him from the vagaries of extreme altitude and harsh climatic conditions,” the statement said.

◆ More than half of COVID-19 patients discharged from hospital still experienced symptoms of breathlessness, fatigue, anxiety and depression for two to three months after their initial infection, according to the findings of a small UK study. The research, led by scientists



**Hospitalised COVID-19 patients can have ongoing symptoms for months**

at Britain's Oxford University, looked at the long-term impact of COVID-19 in 58 patients hospitalised with the pandemic disease. It found that some patients have abnormalities in multiple organs after being infected with the novel coronavirus and that persistent inflammation caused problems for some for months.



**India says Australia will join its naval drills with US, Japan**

◆ India announced yesterday that Australia will join annual naval exercises scheduled with the United States and Japan, in a move that could raise concerns in China, which has previously criticised any joint drills as destabilising. India is hosting the Malabar drills in the Bay of Bengal scheduled for later next month.



**365,240**

Indonesia has over 365,000 coronavirus cases and 12,000 deaths. Total recoveries stand at 289,243



**Sinovac**

Indonesia has secured 50 million doses from China's Sinovac by March next year and 100 million from AstraZeneca by next April, in addition to other deals.

A city in eastern China is offering an experimental coronavirus disease (Covid-19) vaccine outside of clinical trials for around \$60 to high-risk groups under an emergency inoculation programme

## Thai premier recalls parliament as thousands protest again



Protesters display a sign calling for the resignation of Thailand's prime minister at a rally in Bangkok

AFP News

Thousands of Thais defied a fresh government warning yesterday and again took to the streets, as the embattled premier recalled parliament to thrash out how to end weeks of protests.

The protesters rallied in three locations in the capital, singing the national anthem and raising a three-finger salute borrowed from the “Hunger Games” movies that has come to symbolise opposition to the military-backed government.

Some carried signs reading slogans such as “2020 is a bad year, but Thai politics is worse”.

Earlier yesterday, embattled Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha said parliament -- currently in recess -- would be recalled to discuss how to reduce tensions, and warned

protesters not to break the law.

“The government has already compromised to some degree,” he said.

Protesters have defied a government ban imposed last week prohibiting gatherings of more than four people after some activists gave the democracy salute to a royal motorcade.



**The largely leaderless movement is calling for the resignation of Prayut -- a former army chief and mastermind of a 2014 coup -- as well as the re-writing of the military-drafted constitution they say rigged last year's election in his favour.**

## Expert challenges Airlines' COVID safety analysis

● Airlines and planemakers are anxious to restart international travel

Reuters | Paris

A campaign by coronavirus-stricken aviation giants to persuade the world it's safe to fly has been questioned by one of the scientists whose research it draws upon.

Dr David Freedman, a US infectious diseases specialist, said he declined to take part in a recent presentation by global airline body IATA with planemakers Airbus, Boeing and Embraer that cited his work.

While he welcomed some industry findings as “encouraging”, Freedman said a key assertion about the improbability of catching COVID-19 on planes was based on “bad math”.

Airlines and planemakers are anxious to restart international travel, even as a second wave of infections and restrictions take hold in many countries.

The Oct. 8 media presentation listed in-flight infections reported in scientific studies or by IATA airlines, and compared the tally with total passenger journeys this year.



Passengers wearing protective face masks sit on a plane at Sharm el-Sheikh International Airport, following the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt

“With only 44 identified potential cases of flight-related transmission among 1.2 billion travellers, that's one case for every 27 million,” IATA medical adviser Dr David Powell said in a news release, echoed in comments during the event.

IATA said its findings “align with the low numbers reported in a recently published peer-reviewed study by Freedman and Wilder-Smith”.

But Freedman, who co-authored the paper in the Journal of Travel Medicine, said he

took issue with IATA's risk calculation because the reported count bore no direct relation to the unknown real number of infections.

“They wanted me at that press conference to present the stuff, but honestly I objected to the title they had put on it,” the University of Alabama academic told Reuters.

“It was bad math. 1.2 billion passengers during 2020 is not a fair denominator because hardly anybody was tested. How do you know how many people really got infected?” he said. “The absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.”

## “Relevant and credible”

IATA maintains that its calculation is a “relevant and credible” sign of low risk, a spokesman said in response to requests for comment from the organisation and its top medic Powell.

“We've not claimed it's a definitive and absolute number.”

The head of British Airways directly invoked the 1-in-27 million ratio to press for a lifting of quarantines on Monday.

“We know public safety is key for the government, so it should be reassured by IATA's new figures,” Chief Executive Sean Doyle told a UK aviation conference.



**Metropolitan Joseph Mar Thoma, 89, passes away**  
Agency

Joseph Mar Thoma, 21st Mar Thoma Metropolitan and current primate of the Malankara Marthoma Syrian Church died early on Sunday. He was 89.

The metropolitan had been undergoing treatment for pancreas cancer at a private hospital in Thiruvalla in the south India state of Kerala, and his condition deteriorated sharply over the last week. He breathed his last around 2.40 a.m on Sunday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi took to Twitter to convey condolences and wrote: “His Grace the Most Rev. Dr Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan was a remarkable personality who served humanity and worked hard to improve the lives the poor and downtrodden. He was blessed with an abundance of empathy and humility. His noble ideals will always be remembered. RIP.”